



City of Somerville

URBAN DESIGN COMMISSION

City Hall 3rd Floor, 93 Highland Avenue, Somerville MA 02143

NOVEMBER 17, 2021, MEETING NOTES

General Business Meeting

This meeting was conducted via remote participation on GoToWebinar.

NAME	TITLE	STATUS
Sarah Lewis	Co-Chair	<i>Present</i>
Cortney Kirk	Acting Co-Chair	<i>Present</i>
Frank Valdes	Member	<i>Present</i>
Deborah Fennick	Member	<i>Present</i>
Andrew Arbaugh	Member	<i>Present</i>
Tim Talun	Member	<i>Present</i>

City staff present: Andrew Graminski (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning), Daniel Bartman (Planning, Preservation, & Zoning)

The meeting was called to order at 6:33pm and adjourned at 8:06pm.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Meeting Minutes

Following a motion by Member Arbaugh, seconded by Member Fennick, the Commission voted unanimously (4-0) to approve the minutes from October 5, 2021.

GENERAL BUSINESS: Overview of UDC's Purview & Responsibilities

Co-Chair Lewis provided an overview of the Commission's responsibilities and charge as stated in the Somerville Zoning Ordinance. She noted that the Commission is not responsible for zoning compliance and approving projects. The Commission members are peers in the design community are there to provide advice and recommendations.

Co-Chair Lewis made a recommendation to start to institute a design guideline checklist; a tool to use during the design review process. The checklist could be included in each packet sent to Commissioners and the Commissioners could provide initial comments before the design review.

Co-Chair Lewis suggested that they limit each design review to 40 minutes and potentially create a deliberation session. If there needs to be a continuance, there should only be one continuance. There should not be more design demands, if a project is continued. This formal structure could help with timing issues and moving projects forward. A disruptive behavior policy is something for Staff and the Commission to think about with more conversations to come on the topic.

The Commission discussed the length of time for each presentation, if they need to continue to review backyard cottages, preparing for in-person meetings, the proposed design guideline checklist, and the possibility of changing the submittal requirement. The Commission asked to meet with the Planning Board to create a more cohesive approach to the design review process. They understand that they cannot condition a project, but would like a

better way to communicate recommendations to the Planning Board, so that they can incorporate conditions. They discussed their frustrations about the current process.

Deputy Director Bartman reviewed the UDC's Rules of Procedures & Policies. He stated that the Zoning Ordinance authorizes the UDC to create its own rules and procedures. He asked that each Commissioner review the policies and get back to Staff with their comments. The submittal requirements could possibly become a separate document outside of the rules and regulations. The Commission gave positive feedback to that possibility and provided thoughts on what should be included with applicant submissions. The Commissioners also asked if being involved with the Master Plan Special Permits and neighborhood plan development is a possibility.

The Commission and Staff also discussed continued cases and the timeframe for submitting materials to allow for the Commissioners ample time to review said materials prior to the next meeting date.

OTHER BUSINESS: Davis Square Design Guidelines

This item was not discussed.

NOTICE: These minutes constitute a summary of the votes and key discussions at this meeting. To review a full recording, please contact the Planning, Preservation & Zoning Division at planning@somervillema.gov.